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ABSTRACT

Using either an individuals' socioeconomic or ethnic status to predict his prospects for academic achievement or future employment is considered likely to be inaccurate and perhaps even immoral. The action implications of present socioeconomic and ethnic patterns of goal attainment are said to be in dispute. In order to contemplate the value of different actions, it is held necessary to get past the labels "middle class" and "lower class", "black," "white," "nonwhite," and so on, to specific causal processes; it must first be recognized how labeling is itself one of the crucial processes involved in the relationship of social class and ethnicity to goal attainment. Several themes of current research are said to suggest the value of going beyond labels. For instance, a child born into a family without the characteristics associated with its socioeconomic or ethnic category has a different prospect for goal attainment from that of the typical child of that category, provided that child has not been categorized in a way that blocks this prospect. The processes associated with lower status groups are not considered necessarily of an inferior type. It is asserted that, given that social processes reinforce on another, only the most fundamental social intervention could be expected to alter seriously the life prospects of the typical individual of a given group in American society today. (Author/JM)

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# Going Beyond Labels: The Significance of Social Class and Ethnicity for Education

by Joseph C. Grannis

The socioeconomic status of students calculated on the basis of parent occupations and education almost invariably has a strong association with attainment of education and societal goals *when the average attainment of large student aggregates is examined.* On the other hand, using SES to predict an *individual* student's prospects for academic achievement, or future employment, is very liable to error.

Students' ethnicity, especially their majority or minority ethnic status, relates strongly to the life prospects of *aggregates* of students, but again the prediction of *individual* achievement on this basis could easily be wrong.

Perhaps we can say that such predictions for individuals are invalid, even immoral, rather than simply inaccurate. For though the mechanisms of self-fulfilling prophecies have so far proved to be very difficult to identify, there are still strong reasons to suspect that predictions influence outcomes. Indeed, this applies in a similar way to the prediction of outcomes for aggregates as well. While it is true that we can predict the average attainments of different groups in the present or near future, this capability can lead to our accepting current patterns, rather than to our attempting to change the conditions that account for such patterns.

### Process Orientation

Up to this point, the statements of this article are usually accepted by most educators. The action implications of present socioeconomic and ethnic patterns of goal attainment are more in dispute. One reason for this is that the processes involved in these patterns are less understood. In order to contemplate the value of different actions, it is necessary to get past the labels "middle class" and "lower class," "black," "white," "nonwhite," and so on, to *the specific processes that link events in the different spheres of individual experience.*

This article is concerned with this problem of linkage. We must first recognize how labeling is itself one of the crucial processes involved in the relationship of social class and ethnicity to goal attainment. We can then interpret several themes of current research that suggest the value of going beyond labels.

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### Labeling

Allport's classic exposition of the process of categorization in everyday thinking remains a powerful jumping off point for understanding labeling:

> The human mind must think with the aid of categories (the term is equivalent here to *generalizations.)* Once formed, categories are the basis for normal prejudgment. We cannot possibly avoid this process. Orderly living depends upon it (1958).

The use of the phrase "normal prejudgment" points to the ease with which anyone can pass from rational to irrational categorizing. Allport depicts rational thinking as employing given categories for a preliminary sorting of things, and then enlarging and complicating the categories to adapt them to new information. The test of rationality of a category in this view is its openness to information at variance with what had been initially expected. By contrast, a less rational category might be relatively closed to new information. The emotion associated with this category predisposes one to reject information with a different emotional thrust. Thus, though the category is built around a "kernel of truth," misrepresentation tends to be perpetuated through its use.

Allport's analysis of prejudice emphasizes interpersonal thinking. Allport held up scientific laws as an epitomization of rational categories, but the "rational" processes of science and administration also lend themselves to overgeneralization and bias. Even when care is taken to avoid emotional influences, institutionalized procedures to simplify explanations and decisions invoke the process of categorization in ways that may lead to premature closure of thinking. Statistical procedures are highly liable to being used with this result.

The psychologists Caplan and Nelson reported recently

that of 69 data-based, psychological research studies of blacks that were abstracted in the first six months of the 1970 *Psychological Abstracts*, 82% were person-centered and only 18% situation- or environment-centered in their causal attributions. By far the largest category of variables included under the heading "person centered" was "group membership (*e.g.*, black or white)." 48% of all the 69 studies invoked group membership to explain their findings. Person-centered categories, Caplan and Nelson observed, are more available and more easily exploited than situation or environmental categories. Discussing a variety of social problems, including children's problems in schools, these authors argued that "the action (or inaction) taken will depend largely on whether causes are seen as residing within individuals or in the environment" (1973).

National Assessment's current studies of achievement in reading, writing, mathematics, science, citizenship, and other areas illustrate rather starkly the limitations of research that stops with labeling or person-centered attribution. National Assessment has tested a representative sample of the nation's population of ages 9, 13, 17 and young adult, and has analyzed the relative achievement of different subsamples defined in terms of age, sex, color ("Black" and 'non-Black"), parental educational attainment, and location by size and type of community ("extreme affluent suburbs," "suburban fringe," "medium city," "rest of big city," "small city," "extreme rural," "extreme inner city"). In every achievement area, "advantages" have been reported for the groups that were older, non-black, higher in parental educational attainment, and located in extreme affluent suburbs, while "deficits" have been reported for the groups that were younger, black, lower in parental educational attainment, and located in extreme inner-city or extreme rural areas. The reports (*e.g.*, National Assessment of Educational Progress, 1972) make a gesture toward openness in disclosing some of the items for which there are exceptions to these trends. At the same time the reports are replete with statements that will reinforce stereotypes. There is in fact no way of avoiding this, for no data have been collected that would help account for the different performances of individuals other than the information contained in the categories themselves. Factors such as the expectation that an individual will achieve certain knowledge and competence, the resources applied to achieving these and the opportunity the individual has to exercise them are excluded among many that might help to explain how age, sex, color, parental education, and location are associated with differences in achievement. These factors might indeed be better predictors than the more available categories that National Assessment has resorted to, narrowing the differences that now appear to be attributable to the categories. But this is speculation. Without process data, readers of National Assessment's reports are stuck with the categories given.

### Analyzing Processes

Kohn's (1969) research on the conditions that influence fathers' values for their children affords us a basic example of process-oriented explanation. In Kohn's data, social class, defined as occupational position and education, did predict whether fathers tended to value self-direction or conformity to external authority. Higher social class was associated more with valuing children's self-direction, while lower social class was associated more with valuing their conformity. However, when the analysis held constant the degree of self-direction or autonomy that the father experienced at work, social class relationships were reduced by two-thirds. Lower class fathers who experienced autonomy in their jobs valued autonomy for their children much more like higher status fathers who experienced autonomy. Furthermore, most of this reduction of correlation was associated with the occupational status component of social class; educational status continued to contribute to fathers' values independently of their autonomy at work. In other words, while social class is an approximation to the conditions that influence fathers' values for their children, fathers' education and their experience at work describe these conditions more exactly. Research of this kind tells us more about what is happening than the social class categories that turn out to have been merely a clue to these processes.

Scanzoni's (1971) research on black families provides another example of a process analysis. Using questionnaire data obtained from a sample of black husbands and wives in families who had lived together for five years or more (a sample thus comparable to the majority of black families in the nation), Scanzoni found that the occupations and educations of a respondent's parents influenced, but did not totally determine, the "parental functionality" or perceived help in the respondents' "getting ahead." In particular, respondents' mothers were perceived as providing material help and counsel whether they were of higher or lower occupational and education status. Parental occupations, education, and functionality, as well as the respondents' identification with their parents, each contributed to the respondents' educational and occupational achievement; for example, fathers' education influenced the male respondents' educational achievement more than any other factor, but the fathers' parental functionality had the greatest effect on the educational achievement of the female respondents. Finally, the respondents' own educations and occupations contributed differentially, along with other factors, to their aspirations, expectations, and values for their own children.

### Dynamic Concepts

Scanzoni does not abandon the concept of social class in his analysis. On the contrary, he emphasizes the ways in which the life patterns of middle class blacks, like those of middle class whites, tend to be perpetuated from one generation to

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the next. This separates them more and more decisively from an "under class" of blacks whose economic and familial circumstances are complementarily unstable. Likewise Scanzoni stresses discrimination based on color to explain the fact that blacks at a given level of education tend to hold lower status occupations than whites with comparable educations in the national population. At the same time, Scanzoni does not use class and ethnic terms as "things in themselves." Rather he develops them as dynamic concepts in which the processes his research explores are concentrated. This makes it possible to attend to the processes directly in coming to grips with the life of a particular individual or family.

**"An even stronger predictor was 'home literacy,' a combination of attitudinal and behavioral items."**

Still another approach to process is illustrated by Wolf's (1965) examination of the specific relationships between measured intelligence and achievement and measures of home environmental features that were hypothesized to relate directly to these characteristics of individuals. Wolf emphasizes that what parents *did*, rather than what parents *were*, was the focus of his study. His research looked at the climate for achievement motivation, assistance in overcoming academic difficulties, the activity level of significant individuals in the environment, the specific work habits expected of the individuals tested, and other such variables. Each environmental feature was gaged through a set of specific items keyed to the variable in question. For example, Wolf examined the following aspects of home climate for achievement motivation: parental aspirations for child's education, parents' own aspirations, parental concern for academic achievement, social press for achievement, rewards for achievement, parental knowledge of the educational progress of the child, and preparations made for the child's attainment of educational goals. Wolf reported a correlation of .69 between a total rating for intellectual environment and measured general intelligence. A correlation of .80 was obtained between the total achievement environment measure and achievement test scores. By adding a social status indicator to the predictor, Wolf increased the correlations even more. Yet with or without the addition of social status, Wolf's environment measures predicted intelligence and achievement much more accurately than social status alone has predicted them in other studies. Wolf's research has now been replicated a number of times, in most cases with similar findings.

### Home and School Variables

The studies we have noticed so far focus on the home. The Plowden Committee (1966), commissioned to evaluate schools for younger children in England and Wales, looked at the contribution of both home and school variables to children's achievement. The committee found that parents' socioeconomic status predicted achievement better than school variables did, but that an even stronger predictor was what the committee called "home literacy," a combination of attitudinal and behavioral items. Similar findings were obtained in a study by the North Ireland Council for Educational Research (1971). These studies add further weight to Wolf's process approach to home variables. They are also consistent with Jencks' (1972) interpretation of the Coleman Equal Opportunity Survey and related research on the allocation of educational resources, that school resources have little effect on pupils' achievement relative to one another.

But the school resources research has been criticized on various grounds. The strongest of these criticisms can be construed in terms of the research's having neglected process variables in the schools. Bidwell and Kasarda (1975) have argued that by taking schools as the unit of analysis for the educational environment, the Coleman study neglected resource allocation at levels of organization that might be closer to the decision-making that affects students' achievement. In support of this they cite a reanalysis of the Coleman data that suggests *within-school* variability that might be attributed to factors like tracking (Heyns, 1974). They also present their own recently completed study which demonstrates the relation between a school *district's* relative investment in teachers and its aggregate levels of student reading and mathematics achievement. Bidwell and Kasarda found that pupil-teacher ratio correlated negatively with both reading and mathematics achievement, but that teacher qualifications correlated positively (though not significantly in mathematics). They further observed that the percentage of district pupils who came from families with incomes below the nationally-defined poverty level correlated positively with teacher qualification as did the percentage of males and females in the "parent risk" population of a district who had completed at least 4 years of high school education. Contrary to prediction, these categories did not correlate with pupil-teacher ratio. Finally, they concluded that when controlled for teacher qualifications, pupil-teacher ratio, and for percentage of non-white pupils, reading achievement differences *between* districts were influenced by neither family income nor the parent education variable, while relative mathematics achievement was affected only by the education variable. In other words, some of the achievement associated with socioeconomic factors is actually the result of factors influencing teacher qualifications and pupil-teacher ratio. The resulting structural factors then contribute to pupil achievement, granting the several exceptions to this generalization noted above. The Bidwell and Kasarda research points toward ways in which socioeconomic factors might affect school policies which in turn might influence pupils' achievement. At the same time, socioeconomic factors, notably ethnicity, continue to appear to influence achievement directly even within the frame of reference of this study. The relative achievement of pupils of different socioeconomic backgrounds within a school or school district was simply not an issue in the Bidwell and Kasarda research.

### Classroom Conditions

Pedagogy is another aspect of schools that, until recently, seemed to contribute little to achievement when compared to the effect of home variables. In the current Follow Through research, however, certain classroom conditions are emerging as

especially conducive to achievement on tests. It is tempting to call these conditions "structure," as both Cooley (1974) and Stallings (1974), two of the principal Follow Through researchers, have done in public addresses. But this too is a kind of oversimplification and is belied by the sophistication of the research itself. Some of the conditions that are being characterized in this way, notably the prescription of lessons for small groups or individuals rather than on a whole class basis, entail more flexibility than the term "structure" ordinarily suggests. What structure seems to mean in its current Follow Through usage is the rational design of every aspect of the educational environment to support the learning to be evaluated. In other words, pupils spend time under conditions that are optimally prescribed for their learning tasks. Glaser, whose Individually Prescribed Instruction in its Follow Through form is one of the models that has been characterized as more structured, has recently shifted to speaking of "adaptive education":

> A student's progress through the curriculum progression must be adequately monitored by assessment measures and observational judgment by the teacher so that the student's performance dictates the design of a teaching program adaptive to individual requirements (1975).

This is not "learner centered" instruction in the conventional sense anymore than it is "teacher centered" in the conventional sense. The present writer calls it "joint teacher and learner controlled" instruction in that the teacher and the learner jointly control the use of time in the educational environment, the definition of problems and solutions, the interaction among teacher, learner and other learners, and so forth (Grannis, 1975). Its relevance to the present concern is twofold. First, as educators understand better the teaching-learning processes that affect achievement, more of the burden of achievement can be shifted from learners and their social environment to pedagogy. Second, adaptive education, or joint teacher and learner controlled instruction, represents not just a person *or* an environment centered formulation, but the recognition of person-environment *relationships.*

### "Educative Style"

Leichter's (1973) concept of "educative style," the ways different individuals "initiate, search for, absorb, synthesize, and critically appraise the various educative influences in their environment," is particularly promising for an adaptive education. For one thing the individual's mode of timing or "temporal integration," the "manner in which an individual responds to cues from others," "the process by which an individual scans and searches the environment for educational opportunities," do appear to be characteristics that would matter to learning. More important, Leichter conceives of such characteristics not as traits "isolated from individuals' social context," but as modes of conduct that vary in relation to the individual's social settings. For example, Boggs (1972) observed that the Hawaiian children he studied responded positively to being addressed as members of a collective including themselves and adults, negatively to being addressed, by a teacher or the adult observer, as individuals. Similar observations were made by Philips (1972) in a study of American Indian children in community and school. In both cases the school practice of having individual children display their achievement competitively before an adult conflicted with the children's having been socialized outside of school to more collective relationships with adults. If Bernstein's (1971) distinction between "restricted" and "elaborated" codes were renamed "communal" and "individuating" codes – since restrictive code is more the language of shared experience, and elaborated code the language of different experience – this would recognize the fact that "restricted" code has a more positive function than the term implies. The predicament of the children speaking restricted code in school would then be understood as related to the conflict the Hawaiian and American Indian children face in school. All of this illustrates the concept of educative style both in subtleness of the behavior that is involved and in the possibilities for continuity or discontinuity between the home and school contexts of an individual's learning.

### Emphases of Process Research

Some of the process research we have discussed emphasizes more the superior predictiveness of process variables to social class or ethnic variables, while other research stresses the concentration of processes in social class and ethnicity. These emphases do not necessarily contradict each other. It is because certain processes are mutually reinforcing that they be-

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come concentrated in social groups. Scanzoni discusses this very persuasively. At the same time, it is the processes that link most directly with goal attainment. A child born into a family not characterized by the syndrome of processes associated most strongly with the family's socioeconomic or ethnic category has a different prospect for goal attainment than the modal child of that category, *provided the child has not been categorized in a way that blocks this prospect.*

A second generalization that can be drawn from the process approach is that the processes associated with lower status groups could be valued differently than the judgment "lower status" prescribes. Kohn's research shows the adaptation of fathers' values to their circumstances, for example in their presuming the value of their children's conforming to external authority. Boggs and Philips' research shows how a process valued by a minority can be devalued by the majority that controls a sphere of their lives.

A third and final generalization represents the other face of the first. Given that processes reinforce one another, that they seem to be so interlocked in the linkage of events, only the most fundamental social intervention could be expected to alter seriously the life prospects of the modal individual of a given group in American society today, particularly the groups most disproportionately represented in the underclass. This part of Jencks' conclusion is hard to dispute. Bronfenbrenner (1974) strongly implies this in his sobering review of the effectiveness of educational interventions in the home. Wolf argues that the environmental variables that proved to be superior to SES for the prediction of achievement have the additional virtue of their being "educationally malleable," but they are still linked to the physical and emotional security and opportunity a family enjoys. A major intervention would indeed be more effective for attending to these variables. But it could not be accomplished without providing the underclass more general control over their lives. □


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